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ABSTRACT

Although Pennsylvania's Long Range Planning for School Improvement (LRPSI) assumes linkage between school improvement and school compliance with state-mandated registration process guidelines, the extent to which the newly mandated evaluation/registration process will actually contribute to substantive school improvement and a rebuilding of public confidence in the schools remains to be seen. Following a review of long-range planning model assumptions and alternatives and their implications for the evaluative phase of LRPSI (called "registration"), the author examines this phase in detail and suggests that LRPSI stipulations tend to promote reporting over evaluation. The author offers an alternative implementation, evaluation, and registration proposal for school improvement processes that addresses the following: (1) public confidence in schools, (2) action plan implementation and mutual adaptation, (3) school improvement and the role orientation of key participants, (4) organization of relevant information about change processes, (5) dissemination of evaluation information both to inform citizens and to advise decision-making, and (6) project development documentation and the unrestricted review of improvements. The proposal argues for a more open analysis of school efforts to change than the LRPSI registration process' present tendency toward mere state validation of existing behavior. (JBM)

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REGISTRATION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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". Ceremony without ulterior motive is amateur theater,
. Power professionals act for much more than mere show,
. Perform to entertain and impress the audience. But always as enhancements of competitive advantage off-stage."

The Craft of Power by R.G.H. Siu

The inauguration of Pennsylvania's Long Range Planning for School Improvement was conducted with substantial fanfare as terms such as Wave 1, Wave 2, Wave 3 and slogans like "Every school a better school" or "Every school a good school" succeeded in favorably impressing many of the audience, threatening others, and insulting some. Planning for improvement emerged as one intention of the state-mandated activity while the claim was made that research had provided new insight into the improvement challenge. However, more than a few educators were skeptical about these ceremonies about planning for they readily recalled how other state-directed planning process accomplished very little in terms of change. But this planning process was being defined as different and among the differences, none was potentially more threatening to participants and more obscure in definition than the concept of registration.

Does long-range planning by educational organizations accomplish very much? Business and industrial enterprises, military units and other governmental agencies generally are recognized more often than schools for efforts to make use of planning processes in decision making. Only recently have social agencies such as school districts applied forecasting processes in making decisions to commit resources based on estimates of probable futures. Consequently, educational institutions have not been acknowledged for their organizational planning efforts. Yet, schools have been identified as being highly efficient and well-organized institutions--features which are often sought through systematic planning.

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Some understanding of this apparent paradox can be derived by considering the culture of the school. From the point of view of many social scientists, school functions produce behavioral patterns which are not unlike the salient features of cultures. Certain values are evident in our schools both as they fulfill these functions and as they contribute to the transmission of a culture. Routine and stability are important and consequently, planning is first aimed toward maintaining these existing conditions before it addresses improvements which would likely realign the values. So while schools plan, they do so for reasons which are different from those of the business and industrial world where competition and profit represent dominant forces and new products and processes are high priorities. Stability, not change, is a more influential factor as educational planning processes unfold at the school level.

In Pennsylvania, the present cycle of long-range planning in schools has been linked to a generalized concept of school improvement--an association which is new to the State's long-range planning requirements. Previously, other priorities such as the construction of school facilities and the interpretation of state assessment data dominated the planning activities. Present efforts to link long-range planning to various educational improvements represent both a state-wide political agenda for education and an attempt to advocate a frame of reference largely derived from recent research on program implementation processes in schools; i.e. improvement appears to be more attainable at the school level than at some broader base such as the district or system level or the state and national levels.

Among the details of Long-Range Planning for School Improvement (LRPSI) are the procedures for "registration." Details for this event reveal a highly bureacratic process through which local planning and implementation activities are to be validated. Compliance with state guidelines is important. Process,

not outcome standards have been delineated and the implications appear to be that registration is ceremony that will not only emphasize the compliance orientation of the state education agency but also will produce renewed public confidence in the schools. But is compliance with state regulations the reason schools are experiencing an erosion of confidence by its publics?

Many unstated assumptions appear to provide the conceptual network which undergirds the improvement-registration linkage. For example, because school-specific improvement strategies have been observed to be more effective than state-wide plans, the registration process guidelines promote the use of evaluation procedures developed for building-level Action Plans to serve the dual purpose of documenting registration. The assumption in this case may be that evaluation procedures developed as one component of a school-level Action Plan are also suitable to justify registration by the state. Why not? If the evaluation reveals that an attempt is being made to implement the Action Plan, then does that testimony not warrant public recognition? Perhaps, but what is perpetuated when the validation of a process only is publicized as improvement in the substance of education? Does it simply mean that those processes were not previously operating and now they are and that merits special recognition? The compliance value is prominent, not improvement as alluded to by the public or as reported in the research.

This improvement-registration link appears to be operationalized as a kind of operant conditioning which signifies only that something is underway. Perhaps the state strategy is one of positive reinforcement for schools with the long-term fantasy that, in time, school improvement will address the substantive issues directly associated to the decline of public confidence in the schools. More often than not, these "confidence" issues tend to magnify concerns of citizens about technical aspects of education such as the quality of instruction,

school leadership practices, student counseling services, student achievement as well as the escalating costs. Goals usually are not questioned at the school level but the delivery of technical services is associated with the negative views held by the publics.

Yet, the absence of clarity regarding the relaticnship between improvement and registration has not emerged as a critical concern by participants in LRPSI. Perhaps the implementors have recognized this reality and assume that, like previous long-range planning, this too will pass without causing any real re-direction of the educational system. To some, the fanfare of the state was indeed "amateur theater"--a mere show that provided no competitive advantage for the state education agency to provide necessary leadership for school improvement. A casual reaction to registration is apparent in the schools --a reaction which appears to be based on the premature conclusion that every school is a good school.

Can registration address the problems associated with the erosion of confidence? Can this process be designed and implemented in a manner which will facilitate school improvement in ways which have been demonstrated and validated? This paper has been prepared under the assumption that an affirmative response can be made to both of these questions.

A. Assumptions of the Long-Range Planning Model and Implications for Registration

The relationship between registration and long-range planning is more than a simple part-whole connection. Registration appears to be intended as a symbolic gesture which is designed to influence attitudes of participants. Selected details have been announced such as the two procedural stages which are defined for the process. First, the planning procedures and planning document is structured by state guidelines. Information must be presented for five general topics--educational programs/services, school district management, personnel development, community/staff involvement and nondistrict support. Specific questions must be answered in order to qualify as having completed the Preregistration Stage. The Registration Stage follows a period of implementation, during which time the school district is expected to follow the procedures for improvement as explicated in school-specific Action Plans. State guidelines on the Registration Stage stipulate that a progress report is to be completed on developments related to the Action Plans and evaluation procedures defined in each Action Plan are to be adhered to. Specific criteria for registration has yet to be explicated. However, according to these guidelines, a school district must select to be considered for registration. If one does not elect to participate in this process, a progress report remains a requirement but the evaluation document apparently will not be scrutinized by state officials to determine if registration is merited.

This process of registration is part of a five-phase planning model which includes (1) initial preparation, (2) needs assessment, (3) action planning, (4) implementation, and (5) evaluation. The model is cyclical and time allocations are specific to each phase. For example, the first year of the long-range planning model focuses on the first three phases of planning. Implementation,

or Phase 4, is expected to extend for three years and evaluation is projected as the activity for the fifth year. While the cyclical nature of the model is evident, rationality is another feature which appears to be promoted in this process. But what are the assumptions upon which features such as cyclical planning, rationality, and time allocations are based? Furthermore, do the assumptions about planning associate with those regarding school improvement?

First, alternative planning models do exist. The Center for Policy Research[1] identified the following six models for the National Teacher Corps Project which was also designed as a five-year program and included phases comparable to LRPSI:

1. Rationalized Planning: Consists of a careful analysis of tasks to be performed and a system of interrelated roles and procedures which accompany the tasks.

2. Engineering/Architecture Planning: Consists of the application of problem solving or design processes to a pre-set problem. Through continuous refinement, the model produces a unique solution which is strong on clarity, simplicity and aesthetic appeal but resistant to feedback from the environment and to redefinition of the problem.

3. Simulation Planning: Consists of the processes of creating a system similar to the one the planning group is working with and a careful study of its properties.

4. Natural Development Planning: Consists of day-to-day interactions of planners whereby planning is approached as "doing it by doing it." This model tends to focus on program functioning rather than long-term political and strategic planning.

5. Muddling Through Planning: Consists of a mixture of improvisation, expediency, non-planning and short-run coping processes. This model is based on the assumption that long-term and comprehensive planning is not possible since one cannot know the future.

6. Adaptive Planning: Consists of defining purposes, action, reflection and redesigning projects. The model gives priority to feedback from actions.

[1] Taylor, Beverly Loy, Sullivan, Ellen Wahl and Dollar, Bruce. Mapping Teacher Corps Projects, Center for Policy Research, New York, 1978.

Assumptions associated with the "Rationalized Planning" model include the belief that the future of the school district is rather predictable--that there is a clear direction, order and sequence between planning and implementation, between implementation and evaluation and finally, between evaluation and planning. At issue is the extent to which the future of the school district and even the state education agency is predictable in specific areas addressed in the long-range plan such as programs/services, management, personnel, community and non-district technical resources. That one can predict with reasonable accuracy that the districts and state agency will continue to exist is not usually contested. However, participants of these institutions often contend that estimates of changes in the specific features of both the local and state institutions are difficult to validate. Consequently, planning for three-year implementation is not only impractical but also difficult to obtain serious participation by key members of the school. This view is often adopted by skeptics who maintain that LRPSI is destined to the fate of other previous long-range planning efforts of the state. School buildings will close. Personnel will change and probably fewer professional staff will be employed. And the composition of the community will be different as the percent of households with school-age children will continue to decline and parents with children in school will represent a rather small minority of each community. Substantive changes are expected in variables which may not be recognized either during the planning process or as Action Plans are constructed. Yet, the planning model is based on one's skill to forecast the future with certainty. Clearly, the assumptions which undergird the planning model are not congruent with the contextual conditions of the institutions for which the planning is being done.

What is the likely fate of evaluation and subsequent registration processes when an appraisal of the general planning model reveals certain critical problems?

First, the practicality point gains momentum. The state regulations are followed, documents are prepared by school districts but the critical school improvement agenda is not represented as a long-range plan. Compliance can be documented easily and progress reports can be prepared to obtain the sanctions of the regulating agency. But the words and the music of school improvement are not synchronized. Registration becomes amateur theater, and an opportunity is lost to address the need to improve the quality of educational practice.

The implications of this possible outcome extend beyond long-range planning, school improvement and registration. At issue is both a trust factor involving the community and school and competence factor pertaining to evaluation. Will the public confidence issue change? How will the state-of-the-art in evaluation be influenced by the gesture of registration? Will those who prepare progress reports on evaluation procedures be validating improvement when change is not at all evident by students, teachers or concerned citizens?

B. Registration and Evaluation

Registration in the Pennsylvania version of School Improvement is a display of the power of a state education agency to certify school districts as having complied with the rules of this game. This certifying act is based on the documentation of evaluation. The Evaluation Report is defined by the state education agency as follows:

> This report is submitted following implementation in accordance with the district's evaluation design. The Evaluation Report includes a statement about the accomplishment of objectives identified in each action plan, a summary of the data analyzed, and the analysis procedures. The document will be "Accepted" by the PDE based upon whether the evaluation design described in each action plan has been followed. (Long-Range Planning for School Improvement: Guidelines and Instructions, p.v.)

The evaluation design of a school district and of each action plan represents key indicators of the intended relationship between registration and evaluation. Three references to evaluation are made in the LRPSI Guidelines and Instructions:

1. Educational Programs/Services

   Item 6. Develop building-level action plans for each district-wide and building-specific priority goal. Action plans should include the following components:

   a. Objectives of the plan in terms of student growth desired.
   b. Indication of changes to be made. (Examples of areas in which changes can be made include but are not limited to school environment, instructional practice, resource allocations, supervision, staff development, district policies, administrative organization and procedures.)
   c. The major activities to be undertaken to make the changes.
   d. The schedule of major activities.
   e. The position title of the person responsible for each activity.
   f. Expected cost of each activity.
   g. The evaluation questions to be asked and the evidence to be used to answer them.
   h. The position title of the person responsible for the evaluation and the date for the completion of the evaluation.

Item 7. Prepare and submit to PDE for each district-wide priority goal a summary of individual building-level action plans which includes:

a. Objectives in terms of growth desired.

b. Changes to be made.

c. Major activities to be undertaken.

d. Position title of persons responsible.

e. Schedule of major activities.

f. Expected cost of each major activity.

g. Evaluation questions to be asked and the evaluation evidence to be used.

h. Position title of person responsible for district coordination of the LRPSI.

2. School District Management

Action Planning

a. Objectives of the plan.

b. Changes to be made.

c. Activities to be undertaken to make changes.

d. Schedule of major activities.

e. Position titles of person(s) responsible for each activity.

f. Expected cost of each activity.

g. Method for evaluating results of action taken.

h. Position title of person responsible for evaluation and the date of completion of the evaluation.

Consequently, the evaluation task which supports the Registration Process is limited to the following design:

1. For each action plan at the school level, identify the questions asked and the evidence to answer them.

2. At the district level for each district-wide priority goal, summarize building-level action plans including evaluation questions asked and evidence to be used.

3. From a district management perspective, summarize action plans for each priority management goal including the method of evaluating results of action taken.

This approach, whereby the identification of both the evaluation questions and the related evidence is the prerogative of those who prepare action plans for

educational programs/services and management services appears to support evaluation procedures which would continue to feature participation by several special interest groups. That is, if the preparation of action plans is by teachers, students, administrators and parents, then these role groups probably will maintain their interests in and commitment to feedback or evaluation reports. Consequently, an evaluation model, based on principles of non-excludability of role groups from information, should include procedures which stipulate processes by which progress and evaluation reports are openly reviewed and realistic opportunities are available for the special interest groups to express alternative interpretations of evidence. Conventional evaluation procedures for educational settings do not accommodate this type of participation.

The field of evaluation in educational settings presently is experiencing the efforts of several forces for change. Alternative models of program and staff assessment have been broadly disseminated. Technical skills and methods of inquiry are more diverse today than recognized over the past decade as specialists in all fields of the social sciences propose evaluation techniques for school settings. Simultaneous to this rapid expansion of the technical domain in evaluation has been the increased frequency of requests by both educational agencies and the public for clear assessments of programs and processes.

Thus, as evaluation alternatives are promulgated and accountability concerns are sustained, the school improvement effort emerges as an opportunity for educational leaders to respond in a serious manner to the public critique of schools.

The challenge presented in linking evaluation and registration can be represented by questions such as the following:

1. Action Plans and Evaluation at the School Level

   - To what extent are the evaluation questions and related evidence directly associated with the intended student outcomes for building-specific improvement activities?
   - To what extent does the evaluation plan include provisions for

the identification and analysis of implementation issues?

- Does the evaluation of building-level action plans include school performance standards to direct the improvement effort at the school level?

2. Action Plans and Evaluation at the District Level

- What district-wide indices of student outcomes will be used to gauge school-specific developments?
- Does the district-wide monitoring of school improvement activity result in the identification of policy issues associated with improvement?
- Are minimal standards of improvement identified for the purpose of determining if registration is merited?

3. District Management Action Plans and Evaluation

- What evaluation questions and related evidence of developments in district management practices have been specified?
- How will district management practices be monitored?
- Are standards for improvement of district management practices established?

This appeal to refine the evaluation-registration activities is partially based on assessments of other efforts to address school improvement. For example, school improvements have been advocated for a special category of students through Title I. The federally-funded program is also acknowledged as having promoted evaluation activities in schools. An analysis of these efforts by Goettel et al. in 1977[1] revealed that in many cases, the Federal intent to emphasize evaluation resulted in creating the impression that reporting was important, but evaluation for local use was not. Present stipulations in Pennsylvania's Long Range Planning for School Improvement also promotes the reporting processes. The probable consequence of emphasizing reporting over evaluation according to Goettel and his associates, is that few school districts will tend to relate mandated evaluations to program decisions due to the absence of knowledge, commitment or capacity to do so.

[1] R.G. Goettel, B.A. Kaplan and M.E. Orland, "A Study of the Administration of ESEA, Title I in Eight States," Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Research Corp., Oct., 1977.

C. Implementation, Evaluation and Registration: A Proposed Alternative for School Improvement Processes

Forecasting processes in social agencies such as schools have not been held in high esteem by practitioners at the school level of the educational community. The skeptics now question the usefulness and creditability of long-range planning, a forecasting process. In addition, the analysis of registration processes described herein, including several references to the proposed processes, contains more doubts than promise for practitioners. Yet, criticism of this type without recommendations for alternative approaches is not very constructive. Consequently, the following proposal represents an option to existing registration regulations and an idea in need of practical testing.

This plan rests on a set of assumptions about school improvement and evaluation methodologies as follows:

1. The priority attached to the state-wide School Improvement Project in Pennsylvania acknowledges the need to address the erosion of public confidence in the schools.

2. Successful implementation of projects designed to improve schools results in the mutual adaptation of plans and contextual settings.

3. Improvements within schools are dependent upon the role orientation of key participants.

4. The organization of relevant information about previous efforts to change schools can facilitate the development of conceptual frameworks to direct improvement strategies.

5. Information produced through project evaluation can be disseminated both to inform a citzenry and to advise decision making by key participants.

6. Documentation of project developments allows for a more unrestricted review of improvement practices than the conventional evaluation models which focus exclusively on objectives.

1. Public confidence in schools. Throughout this document, the claim has been made that school improvement represents a need to address the erosion of support for public education. Convincing and irrefutable evidence to validate this claim is difficult to identify and consequently, the 'confidence' conclusion

strains to attract a concensus. For each citation of negative views about the schools, another reference to testify to the success of schooling can be made. And these critical claims along with the success stories can be based on many forms of information -- research or scientific observations, professional practitioner experiences and common sense are some of the domains represented.

Nevertheless, the improvement label displays an orientation that things need to be made better. This frame of reference obviously need not be associated with a decline in public confidence, especially if schools have had a history of successful improvements. But schools appear to value the maintenance of existing routines over change. Yet, efforts have been made to reform schools and over a span of years, improvements have been instituted. Yet, while changes are evident to some, one does not sense a kind of confidence either by the professional staff of a school or by the public they serve that operations and outcomes can indeed be improved.

Consider, for example, the recent interest generated by the claims that some urban schools have performed beyond the expectations commonly held for them. These "effective schools" have been recognized because they have recently attained success in academic achievement. Furthermore, the "effective schools" often exist within communities where other schools with comparable conditions have not been successful. Can parents be confident that their children will receive the opportunities in all schools that some obtain in the "effective schools"? Edmonds[1] reported his views on this point as follows:

> "In conclusion this reference to schools that teach all their children what their parents want them to know when they send them to school is not theoretical and does not derive from moral persuasion. It is a discovery as contrasted to an invention. My conclusion in that regard derives from the fact that effective schools do in fact exist and they exist right now. The second conclusion I draw is that the existence of

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[1]Ron Edmonds, "Developing Effective Schools," New England Teacher Corps Network Presentation, June, 1980.

> these schools for me raises the question, "Why aren't they all like that?" My own answer to the question is that we happen to live in a society that values some of its people much more than it values others. Educators like all other social services serve those they think they must and when they think they need not, they do not. Unfortunately most of the children who do not get those services, in general and in education in particular, happen to be members of politically impotent groups-children who are either poor, of color, or both. But schools do exist that can solve the problem. The existence of those schools means that it is realistic to suppose that all of them could be like that. And finally, I would say that whether or not our social order ever makes education the instrument of equity of which it is capable probably depends on how you feel about the fact that we have not done that so far."

Or perhaps the erosion of confidence can be supported by the view that public schools try to do so many things that they are destined to mediocre performance in some areas. In a recent study of private and public schools which included an examination of several premises which facilitate or constrain the use of private schools, the investigators concluded that the factual premises underlying policies that would facilitate use of private schools were better supported than those that would constrain their use.[1] These researchers also phrased this conclusion as follows:

> "...the constraints imposed on schools in the public sector (and there is no evidence that those constraints are financial, compared with the private sector) seem to impair their functioning as educational institutions, without providing the more egalitarian outcomes that are one of the goals of public schooling."[2]

Thus, the claim pertaining to the erosion of public confidence in schools is supported by two points -- (1) parents cannot anticipate the provision of appropriate educational services in all schools and (2) private - public school comparisons result in conclusions that private schools produce better cognitive outcomes, are safer, more disciplined and a more ordered environment than public schools. However, private schools do not provide the range of educational programs as is

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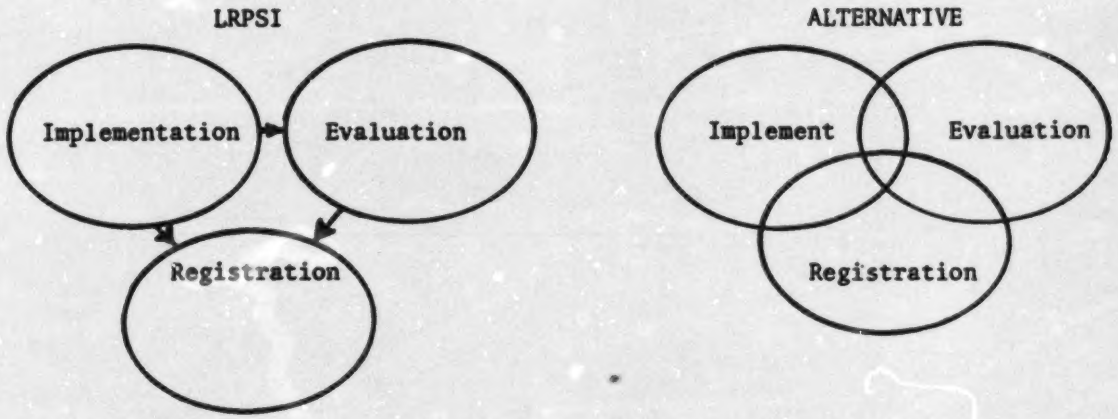
[1]James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore. Public and Private Schools, Contractor Report, National Center for Education Statics, November, 1981.

[2]Ibid, p. XXXII.

provided in public schools. These two points are not mutually exclusive for as parents realize that they cannot be confident about the quality of services available in a public school, many take comfort in believing that private schools will remove that doubt. Still other critics who for many reasons do not consider the private school option as an alternative, respond accordingly--often in a negative manner. It is therefore assumed herein that school improvement represents a state-wide plan to address the 'confidence' issue.

2. Implementation of Action Plans and the concept of mutual adaptation. Implementation, or the processes of putting ideas into practice, is designated as the second phase of LRPSI. The time allocated to do so is three years, after which evaluation is proposed as the third phase. This plan represents an alternative to the original design in that implementation, evaluation and registration are planned as overlapping processes. Graphic representation of the two points of view is as follows:



The Alternative plan draws extensively from the analysis of research on federal programs which supported educational change. Berman and McLaughlin[1] reported in the frequently quoted Rand Study that effective implementation cases included concrete teacher-specific training, in-class assistance, teachers

[1]P. Berman and M.McLaughlin. Federal Programs Supporting Education Change, Vol. IV: The Findings in Review. Santa Monica, CA.: The Rand Corporation, 1975.

observing other teachers, participative governance, local materials development and teacher - administrator interaction in staff development. These researchers also emphasized the importance of the mutual adaptation phenomena that occurs between the school context and proposed changes as ideas were translated into practice. Thus, the processes of implementation result in changes to both the idea or Action Plan and to the context or school in which the improvement activity is located. School improvement evaluation should provide for the documentation and analysis of the mutual adaptations made for Action Plans.

The Alternative plan is also based on the belief that the evaluation domain need not be restricted to conventional models. Consequently, the evaluation process can be tailored to the features of implementation. The task is to first be cognizant of implementation activity and the context within which it is occurring. Then, the choice of the most appropriate evaluation model can be made. The diagram on the Alternative reveals that a subset of implementation is used to focus the evaluation of Action Plans and that likewise, a subset of evaluation is applied to the activity of implementation.

Registration is also projected to intersect with implementation as well as with evaluation. Stated in another way, registration should apply only to selected aspects of the implementation process. In addition, the evaluation-registration overlap signifies the intended relationship of these processes; i.e., aspects of registration are clearly a part of the evaluation procedures.

Finally, the diagram of three intersecting sets includes the representation of an area which is common to all three -- a domain which probably represents the substance of school improvement.

In order to clarify the concepts represented by the three intersecting sets (implementation, evaluation, registration), one must consider the types of concerns represented by each location on the diagram. Consider the following questions:

1. Implementation - Evaluation Link: Considering the six components of implementation reported in the Rand Study, which ones are to be included in the project evaluation? What aspects of mutual adaptation are to be scrutinized in the evaluation?

2. Implementation - Registration Link: Since the SEA will designate schools as being registered, what evidence from implementation activity will be necessary for this decision to be made? Of the components which contribute to successful implementation which ones will be reviewed for purposes of determining registration? Is the identification of mutual adaptation needed for registration? Should regional review processes be established to validate registration claims?

3. Evaluation - Registration Link: What aspects of implementation evaluation will be utilized to make decisions about registration? Will criteria for registration be identified so evaluation plans can be formulated?

4. Implementation Only: What insight has the staff acquired about the processes of implementation that will be helpful in other improvement projects? To what extent are factors evident such as staff ability, institutional and personal values, information, contending local circumstances, timing, competing obligations of personnel, resistance to change and project yield?

5. Evaluation Only: What evaluation models tend to be utilized most frequently in school-specific Action Plans? for district plans? What factors are considered in determing which approach to evaluation is to be used?

6. Registration Only: What impact is the granting of registration having on the continuation of school improvement efforts? What evidence exists that registration is addressing the problems associated with the erosion of public confidence in the schools?

7. Implementation - Evaluation - Registration Linkage: Of the improvements planned, which ones are readily recognizable by the public, the professional staff and the certifying agency? What is the next step in school improvement?

3. Improvement and the role orientation of key participants.

The state guidelines for the preparation of Action Plans for educational programs/services and for school district management include the identification of the position title of the person responsible for each activity. In this proposed alternative to the existing registration process, the focus on position

title is modified to emphasize the role orientation of key participants in each Action Plan. This orientation to role over position draws from conceptual frameworks associated with Role Theory and emphasizes a functional analysis of behaviors associated with the implementation of a given activity.

Another reference to role orientation was made by Orland and Goettel in their analysis of the implementation of Federal categorical programs. These researchers emphasized the middle link the states fulfill when Federal programs are enacted in local education agencies. They used the concept of "state role orientation"[1] to define the nature of state implementation behavior. This orientation can be applied to the School Improvement Program in Pennsylvania for it explicates important insight into the relationship between improvement activity and the associated functions of key participants. Orland and Goettel defined this concept as follows:

> "State role orientation refers quite simply to how the state implementors of federal categorical programs perceive their appropriate role or mission within the intergovernmental administrative system. The concept is borrowed from social psychology literature which has long recognized the explanatory power of the concept of role in understanding individual behavior in an organizational setting."[2]

In the proposed alternative to registration, the documentation of improvement activity would include an analysis of modifications in role responsibilities for administrators, teachers and other support personnel such as counselors and supervisors. While this documentation may not be used directly to validate improvement, it would be examined to make decisions on the programmatic adjustments needed at the school and district levels in order to maximize the improvement effort.

4. Organization of relevant information about change processes.

The preparation of Action Plans in accordance with state guidelines is guided

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[1]Martin E. Orland and Robert J. Goettel, "States and the Implementation of Federal Categorical Programs in Education: A Heuristic Framework" Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Summer, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1982, pp. 141-155.

[2]Ibid, p. 14.

by a series of questions, each of which is focused on defining details of the school improvement activity. For example, objectives, changes to be made, activities and schedule of events are categories of information to be constructed for these plans. Justifications for the selection of a specific focus are to be derived from the assessment of needs, a process which is primarily structured according to state goals for education, state assessment program and other data as identified by planners. It is assumed in this proposal that this planning process and the subsequent implementation effort should reflect an awareness of information about other efforts to improve schools. While substantial agreement on what we know about these processes may be difficult to obtain, that possibility should not be used to defend the avoidance of this type of information and its contribution to the school improvement effort. Dunn[1] proposes that reforms can be viewed as arguments. This metaphor was described as follows:

> "..., reforms are best viewed as arguments, a metaphor whose roots lie in the everyday social interaction of policy makers, scientists and citizens-at-large. When we revisualize reforms as arguments, it is no longer possible to make facile distinctions between "science" and "ordinary knowledge," nor are we likely to reach the potently false conclusion that knowledge derived from one or the other source is inherently superior."

The proposed alternative would incorporate this view by promoting the identification of assumptions which undergird the proposed improvement processes. This could be accomplished through various interactions with key participants during the planning and implementation phases. As this framework is defined, the documentation process can be utilized to evaluate planned changes and to adjust Action Plans accordingly. This view of incorporating existing knowledge about change, as revealed in the assumptions, into the planning process after the process has been completed emphasizes the need to evaluate planning as one dimension of the

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[1]William N. Dunn, "Reforms as Arguments," Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization, Vol. 3, No. 3, March 1982, p. 295.

improvement process. The need to do so is founded on the belief that improvement of the type needed in schools will require on-going planning and implementation and each new cycle of this process should be based on the shared learning of previous practices.

5. Dissemination of evaluation information both to inform citizens and to advise decision making. The practice of sharing information about efforts to improve schools usually appears as a public relations event in which only favorable results are disseminated. At times, it is argued that if negative findings were reported to the public, the reactions would be drastic and damaging to programs and people. Others who question the wisdom of presenting a comprehensive view of a school's effort to improve often doubt if the public at large is interested in or can interpret the program results. Furthermore, evaluators and other social science researchers often doubt if the information produced through their inquiries is used by decision makers.

Access to information has been considered a key to the maintenance and exercise of power in an organization. That knowledge is power is a common claim. For school improvement efforts, especially those that are in part responses to the erosion of public confidence in the schools, the concerns for access to information need to be clearly addressed. Coleman[1] identified two models for feedback processes in a large society which provides widely different responses to questions about information dissemination. These two models were based on different assumptions. One approach views information to be a private good and consequently, knowledge is controlled by key decision makers. The other is a model of society as consisting of many actors and societal decisions are viewed as "...the outcome of a political process in which a great many actors, the whole spectrum of interested parties, press their interests via the existing political institutions." (Coleman, p. 8).

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[1]James S. Coleman, "Policy Research and Rights to Information," Paper presented at the Conference on Knowledge Utilization, Pittsburgh, PA., 1981.

The approach herein advocated for information dissemination on school improvement is based on the second model referred to by Coleman -- information for the public good. Consequently, documentation and the evaluation processes utilized to assess school improvement practices should include clear stipulations on the preparation, review, analysis and reaction by key participants including parents and other citizens of the community.

6. Documentation of project developments and the unrestricted review of improvements. This alternative to the existing registration process emphasizes the interactive nature of implementation, evaluation and registration. A documentation system is advocated to replace existing progress reports. This system should include a series of specific questions regarding implementation processes. Documentation reports should be prepared for internal review at least two times each year and the review procedures should promote open discussion by key participants including citizens of the community. Furthermore, the documentation process should include the specific evaluation procedures to be used to assess the effects of improvement efforts. Finally, this alternative includes the development of regional review processes to recommend school registration. By so doing, claims to authorize registration could be scrutinized, questions or concerns could be raised and more in-depth interaction between schools and these regional units could result in a more public analysis of the school improvement effort.

While the details of the documentation system and regional reviews are not included in this document, the idea has been presented for the purpose of promoting a more open discussion about registration and its implications. This view of inquiry was described by Popkewitz[1]:

> Educational inquiry should provide a mode of analysis that can illuminate the unintended and latent consequences of our school

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[1]Thomas S. Popkewitz, "Educational Research: Values and Visions of Social Order," Theoretical Paper No. 71, Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Individualized Schooling, the University of Wisconsin, September 1978.

> arrangements. The ceremonies and rituals of our public institutions create symbolic forms which make ongoing practices seem heroic, institutional structures seem benevolent, and professionals seem competent in maintaining the historic mission of schools. Yet social affairs are filled with pretentions, deceptions, and self-deceptions by which people cloak the meanings and consequences of their arrangements with each other. Our institutional arrangements have become traditional, customary, and seemingly "natural." The unmasking and debunking motif in social inquiry can be a powerful intellectual force in a social world that is built upon beliefs in certainty.

That which is being questioned about a process called registration and a state-wide program labeled school improvement is not the need or even the urgency to address the questions about the quality of education. The declines in measures of student performance coupled by simultaneous increases in costs have produced a public reaction which is often not supportive of present educational practices. But that which is being addressed in this document pertains to a different approach to school improvement. The assumption upon which this alternative is based is drawn from the belief that the improvements needed require a different approach to the complex institutions we call schools. As observed in a recent publication[1] about the responses of schools to programs of change, the authors noted that institutional life is not easily altered and when schools are faced with reform, they exhibit remarkable resilience, subsequently incorporating the innovations into existing patterns of behavior and belief. Furthermore, as the schools absorb these efforts to improve, they tend to use the slogans of improvement to suggest reform.

This plea for alterations in the registration process is also a request to modify many existing practices of school-community relations. Rather than a registration process which results in the state validation of existing patterns of behavior as improvements, this request is a more open and unrestricted analysis of the efforts of schools to change.

[1] Thomas S. Popkewitz, B. Robert Tabachnick and Gary Wehlage. The Myth of Educational Reform, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, pp.19-20.

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